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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001779

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SE, NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2018

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY LEADERSHIP'S  
CONVERGING VIEWS ON PKK FIGHT

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A consensus appears to be emerging on the elements needed to defeat the PKK and the GOT and Turkish military are collaborating closely, according to several well-placed sources. These elements include: denying PKK safe havens in northern Iraq; granting security forces additional powers in line with democratic principles; providing economic development, improving education and health services, advancing social and cultural rights in the Southeast; and improving the integration of Kurdish migrants in urban areas. Civilian and military leaders, along with opinion makers and counter terrorism experts are in agreement that the opposition parties, call for a buffer zone in northern Iraq is unworkable. Observers agree that TGS CHOD Basbug,s pragmatism and understanding of the counter terrorism challenge and the AKP,s desire to make gains in the Southeast in the March 2009 municipal elections provide a potential window of opportunity for the government and military to take coordinated action to address the root causes of the PKK. However, there remains deep skepticism whether GOT and TGS leaders will be able to agree on specific proposals and overcome ideological differences and bureaucratic inertia to implement a coordinated plan of action. End Summary.

Emerging Consensus  
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¶2. (C) Ihsan Bal (please protect), a counter terrorism expert at the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK), said there is an "emerging consensus" between the military and government on the general contours of a strategy to address the root causes of support for the terrorist organization. Bal, who attended an October 8 brainstorming session chaired by Turkish General Staff (TGS) Chief General Basbug, said he has participated in a number of other brainstorming sessions with the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs over the past few months and the general sense emerging from these sessions was strikingly similar.

Non-Military Measures Key  
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¶3. (C) Specifically, Bal said there is broad agreement military and non-military efforts must be coordinated and implemented simultaneously, not sequentially, and that the key to defeating the PKK is to address the root causes of Kurdish support for the terrorist organization through

non-military measures. At the brainstorming session -- which he characterized as a genuine dialogue with Basbug -- Bal said the bulk of the discussion was on non-military means to defeat the PKK. The key elements raised repeatedly during the meeting included: Democratization, economic development and job creation, education and health services, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and better integration of ethnic Kurds in urban areas.

#### Denying PKK Safe haven in Iraq Remains a Priority

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14. (C) Nihat Ali Ozcan (please protect), another counter terrorism expert at the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) who also attended the TGS brainstorming session and who met separately with PM Erdogan on October 8, said denying the PKK safe haven in northern Iraq also remains a priority. Both he and Bal said there was broad agreement at the TGS brainstorming session and in their discussions with GOT officials that Turkey's preferred approach is to work in unison with the US and Iraq to increase pressure on the KRG to deny the PKK freedom of movement and logistical support. Both noted that the general view among policy makers, experts and the public is that the KRG continues to provide logistical support to the PKK and allow wounded PKK fighters to receive medical treatment at hospitals in KRG controlled areas. Both also said the public continues to believe that Marsoud Barzani would take more action if the US really placed pressure on him (Note: This is a view reiterated by numerous Embassy contacts since the October 3 Aktutun attack. End Note). Bal stressed repeatedly that

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Turkey would be willing to "guarantee" Barzani's status as a regional authority if he actually took action against the PKK.

15. (C) Bal observed there remains a significant gap between what GOT and TGS leaders are saying about US-Turkish intelligence sharing (cooperation is strong and ongoing) and the public perception (Aktutun could not have happened if the Americans were giving Turkey good intelligence). He suggested that the USG consider steps to close this perception gap.

#### Additional Powers for Security Forces

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16. (C) Bal and Ozcan also noted an additional element of the emerging common strategy is granting some additional authority to the military to combat the PKK within Turkey, although they both said media reporting of tensions between the military and government regarding the appropriate scope of additional powers were exaggerated. Both the military and GOT agree that any additional powers granted to security forces should be in line with democratic practices and the rule of law.

17. (C) Influential journalist Murat Yetkin (protect), who is considered well connected to the military, agreed. He told the DCM he was surprised to learn the extent to which the government and military have been consulting on additional measures to strengthen Turkish security forces, efforts against the PKK. Yetkin said the October 9 High Counter Terrorism Council meeting was scheduled well before the Aktutun attack at the behest of General Basbug. There have been numerous working level meetings between various elements of the GOT and the Turkish military to discuss what powers the military believe will be effective. While the military wants more than the government is willing to concede, the atmosphere of the discussions has been collaborative, not confrontational, according to Yetkin.

#### Buffer Zone a Non-Starter

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¶8. (C) With respect to calls by opposition parties for the creation of a buffer zone in northern Iraq, Bal and Ozcan both dismissed the proposal. Bal called it "irresponsible politics, not policy." Ozcan said no one in the military is seriously considering this. He noted Deputy TGS Chief Igsiz said publicly the idea was "very risky" in response to a question October 5 on whether Turkey should create a "security belt" in northern Iraq (Note: Prior to becoming DCHOD, Igsiz lead the Second Army which has primary responsibility in combating the PKK in southeast Turkey). Responding to a press question, PM Erdogan said on October 13 that "We do not need a buffer zone. We are doing what is necessary (to fight terrorism)."

Window of Opportunity Exists...

¶9. (C) Both Bal and Ozcan agreed that Basbug has a pragmatic approach to the PKK problem, and that he showed a genuine understanding of the counter terrorism challenge and a willingness to consult views outside the military (both said the brainstorming session Basbug hosted was the first time in their recollection a TGS chief asked to meet directly with non-military experts). Ozcan stressed Basbug's tenure as TGS chief is a window of opportunity for the GOT to develop a truly comprehensive strategy to defeat the PKK. Bal echoed Ozcan's observation about Basbug and added that given the AKP's stated goal of making additional gains in the Southeast in the March 2009 municipal elections, the GOT will also be motivated to make some meaningful progress in extending economic, social, and cultural measures in the Southeast.

... But Expectations Are Low

¶10. (C) Despite the appearance of a consensus among GOT and

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TGS leadership and willingness to work together on a way forward, both Bal and Ozcan were skeptical whether the GOT and TGS will be able to overcome ideological differences and bureaucratic barriers to develop, much less implement, a comprehensive anti-PKK strategy. For its part, the GOT has been downplaying expectations. During a press interview, Deputy Prime Minister and GOT Spokesman Cicek echoed PM Erdogan's October 7 statement that the fight against terrorism is a long term struggle and "it is not possible to eradicate terrorism overnight." He dismissed questions about whether there will be a package of proposals coming out of a follow-on High Counter Terrorism Council meeting on October 12, stating "It is not right to introduce packages. Indeed, there should not be announcements at all."

¶11. (C) COMMENT: We agree that any additional steps to address root causes of PKK terrorism will likely be incremental and modest, particularly as the AKP-led government shows signs of trying to limit electoral damage from opposition party charges of corruption and weakness against terror (septel). However, signs that the GOT and the military are willing to work closely to address the PKK issue are encouraging. It is clear calls for a buffer zone and for the restoration of emergency powers in the Southeast are not gaining traction. Further dramatic attacks by the PKK may give new life to these bad ideas, while meaningful steps taken by the KRG to curtail PKK's freedom of movement would help tamp down calls for Turkish ground incursions into northern Iraq should the PKK strike again.

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